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## CURRENT AMERICAN LITERATURE.

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By far the most important of recent contributions to American historical literature is the posthumous narrative,\* in which Gen. McClellan recounts his experience in the war of the rebellion. The materials relating to the Peninsula and Maryland campaigns had, it seems, been collected and discussed by the author without any view to their immediate publication, and the consequently needful work of selection has been judiciously performed by Dr. W. C. Prime, to whom we are also indebted for a prefatory sketch, which is an admirable example of a brief biography. One of the main objects of this book is to set forth the evidence for the conviction, firmly held by Gen. McClellan, that his army was deliberately sacrificed in the Peninsula by politicians possessed of great influence at Washington, who preferred to see the Civil War prolonged rather than the Union re-established at a date and under conditions fatal to such changes of the Federal Constitution as would insure the abolition of slavery. It cannot be denied that much documentary proof is here forthcoming to sustain this accusation, which is particularly leveled at Secretaries Chase and Stanton. Thus, according to the editor of his diary (Warden), Mr. Chase, on July 2, 1862, urged Mr. Lincoln to remove McClellan on the ground "that I did not regard Gen. McClellan as *loyal to the administration*, although I did not question *his general loyalty to the country*." From this avowal, Mr. Prime, the editor of this volume, not unreasonably infers that "the controlling consideration of such leaders as Mr. Chase in the use of the blood and the treasure of the people, was the supremacy of party, and not the success of the country." Still more significant are the extracts from Mr. Chase's private diary under date of the appeal to McClellan to defend the capital after Pope's defeat. "I remarked," writes Mr. Chase, "that this [the defense of Washington] could be done equally well by the engineers who constructed the forts." And again, "I remarked that I could not but feel that giving command to him [McClellan] was equivalent to giving Washington to the rebels. This, and more, I said." Additional light is cast on the attitude of Chase and Stanton at this time by Mr. Welles, Secretary of the Navy, in his book, "Lincoln and Seward." He records that at the cabinet meeting on Tuesday, September 2d, 1862, "Stanton entered the council-room a few moments in advance of Mr. Lincoln, and said, with great excitement, he had just learned from Gen. Halleck that the President had placed McClellan in command of the forces in Washington. The President soon came in, and, in answer to an inquiry from Mr. Chase, confirmed what Stanton had stated. General regret was expressed, and Stanton, with some feeling, remarked that no order to that effect had issued from the War Department. The President calmly, but with some emphasis, said the order was his, and he would be responsible for it to the country. Before separating, the Secretary of the Treasury [Chase] expressed his apprehen-

\* McClellan's Own Story. New York: Charles L. Webster & Co.

sion that the reinstatement of McClellan would prove a national calamity." Further and equally definite testimony to the same effect, given by Postmaster-General Blair, is now in the hands of Mr. Prime, and bears the date of April 22d, 1870 : "The bitterness of Stanton on the reinstatement of McClellan you can scarcely conceive. He preferred to see the capital fall. McClellan was bound to go when the emergency was passed, and Halleck and Stanton furnished a pretense." This statement is reiterated by Mr. Blair in a subsequent letter dated April 3d, 1879 : "The folly and disregard of public interests thus exhibited would be incredible, but that the authors of this intrigue, Messrs. Stanton and Chase, when the result of it came, and I proposed the restoration of McClellan to command, and to prevent the completion of ruin by the fall of this capital, *actually declared that they would prefer the loss of the capital to the restoration of McClellan to command.* Yet these are the men who have been accounted by a large portion of our countrymen as the civil heroes of the war, while McClellan, who saved the capital [at Antietam] was dismissed." In view of this cumulative evidence, it will not be easy for unprejudiced readers to resist the conclusion that, however these machinations may have inured to the public good through that ultimate abolition of slavery, which as yet had not been officially proposed, McClellan was a victim of political purposes, with which, as a soldier, he could not be conversant, and of men whom he supposed to mean what they had said. Another point on which the editor of this narrative lays stress, and which well deserves to be remembered, is the fact that under the order of September 2d, 1862, which was never modified, McClellan was not authorized to direct forces in the field, but was distinctly restricted to the "command of the fortifications of Washington, and of all the troops for the defense of the capital." In other words, McClellan led the Army of the Potomac to the swiftest and most brilliant campaign in its history, to the momentous victories of South Mountain and Antietam, without any written warrant from the authorities at Washington, or, to use his own expression, "with the halter around his neck." Had he failed, he might have been court-martialled. He won, and was dismissed. The effect of this and many another revelation, now for the first time backed with conclusive proof, is to fully justify the assertion of McClellan and of his friend, the editor, that the history of the Civil War could not be accurately written until McClellan's story had been told. We should add that the General's letters to his wife, many extracts from which are printed in this volume, exhibit the writer's character in a singularly amiable and interesting light.

A book which should be read in connection with McClellan's narrative is General F. A. Walker's History of the Second Army Corps.\* Although the specific aim of this work is rather biographical than critical, the author does not refrain from expressing his personal opinions regarding some of the controversies raised by the conduct of the Peninsula and Antietam campaigns. The general effect of his testimony to the value of McClellan's services, and to the confidence reposed in that commander by the officers and soldiers who served under him, is not materially lessened by some qualifications in relation to McClellan's course on particular occasions. For example, writing of the battle of Fair Oaks, Gen. Walker submits that there were grounds for complaint as to the way in which the functions of the Commander of the Union Army were exercised. "With troops," he says, "to many of whom it was to be their first battle, under corps-commanders picked from the colonels of the regular army, and staff-officers almost absolutely war and

\* History of the Second Army Corps, by Francis A. Walker. New York : Charles Scribner's Sons.

uninstructed, it will always seem strange that Gen. McClellan did not feel that his place was with the half of his army that was to fight, rather than with that half which was not to fight." Again, after describing the situation in the Peninsula on the eve of the battle of Mechanicsville (which took place June 26th, 1862), Gen. Walker concurs with those military critics who opine that "McClellan, in this instance, as elsewhere, overestimated his adversary's strength. This is the point to which the hostile criticism of his military career must chiefly be directed. This was the prime cause of his defeat on the Peninsula, and of his comparative failure (?) in Maryland. The Comte de Paris, then his Staff-Officer, assures us that on the occasion we have described, McClellan believed that Jackson's arrival would swell Lee's army to 160,000 men. It was in this mistaken view of his adversary's numbers that McClellan decided not to fight for his communications, but to retreat to the James River." We observe further, that on page 98, when discussing the battle of Antietam, Gen. Walker joins issue with the Comte de Paris, who asserts that the slow movements of the Union forces, by which that engagement was delayed, should be ascribed to their antecedent demoralization in Pope's campaign. According to the Comte de Paris, "two weeks only had elapsed since McClellan had taken command of this army, or rather this disorganized mob. He had not been able to transform it sufficiently to secure that regularity and perseverance in the march which, even more than steadiness under fire, constitutes the superiority of old troops." This averment is pronounced by Gen. Walker "altogether erroneous." He declares that the Potomac Army, excepting possibly the First and Twelfth Corps, was "in better condition on the 15th of September, 1862 [the eve of Antietam], than on the 30th of June, 1863 [the eve of Gettysburg]." In Walker's judgment, the superiority of 1863 over 1862 was in "the spirit that animated general headquarters, and in the organization of the staff." Notwithstanding these allusions to what the historian of the Second Army Corps considers McClellan's limitations, Gen. Walker acknowledges that it was absolutely inexcusable to supersede him by Burnside. "The first Commander of the Army of the Potomac had not one fault or deficiency which was not found greatly exaggerated in his successor, while of McClellan's many high qualifications, Burnside had hardly a trace. Those who selected Burnside for a fearful responsibility, against his own will, can only be excused from criminality by the plea that they were not judges of character; that they could not interpret acts, or even read the plainest indications of physiognomy." But Gen. Walker does not confine himself to such faint praise of McClellan as is implied in this comparison with Burnside. He goes much further and admits that, "even had the administration been prepared to replace Gen. McClellan by an officer of equal ability, it would still have been fairly a matter of hesitation, for it is a serious thing to strike at a sentiment like that with which the army regarded their first chief. Such a degree of affection and confidence itself constitutes a powerful reinforcement to that military strength which can be at any time called out and used without regard to the personality of the commander." Though not, as we have seen, a partial critic, Gen. Walker adds his testimony to the unanimous affirmation of McClellan's military comrades that, "No other commander ever aroused the same enthusiasm in the troops, whether in degree, or in kind. The soldiers fairly loved to look upon him; the sight of him brought cheers spontaneously from every lip; his voice was music to every ear. Let military critics or political enemies say what they will, he who could move the hearts of a great army, as the wind sways long rows of standing corn, was no ordinary man; nor was he who took such heavy toll of Joseph E. Johnston and Robert E. Lee an ordinary soldier."

Since Washington Irving was sent as Minister to Madrid, few American diplomatists have turned their opportunities to better account than has Mr. Benjamin, lately Minister to Teheran. He has given us\* the observations of an accomplished traveler, rather than the discoveries of an archæologist, and his work is all the better done because he did not try to do too much. It is the Persia of to-day which he endeavors to make known to us, not the Persia of Abbasid, Sassanid, Parthian, Seleucid, and Achæmenid times. Not that there are not extant architectural vestiges of all those epochs, but each of them requires the careful study of a specialist for right interpretation. But, by giving minute delineation of Iran under the present dynasty, in what is probably the latest period of its independent existence, Mr. Benjamin has produced in a definite and lasting form an important chapter in that exhaustive history of Persia which may ultimately be written. Nor will he who follows the author's discussion of the arts of Persia fail to recognize at all events such a familiarity with the long annals of the country as is needed for an elucidation of the present by the past. We observe that Mr. Benjamin inclines to regard the actual state of Persian art as one of transition, rather than of decay, though he omits to suggest how native methods and ideals can be adjusted to the strange conditions of Russian ascendancy, to which they seem destined to be presently subjected. The Persian assimilated Greek culture, and imposed his own civilization on the Caliphate of Bagdad, but it is hard to see how anything analogous to either result can follow his impending absorption in the Russian Empire. It is, however, we repeat, just because the existence of Persia as an independent nationality, tolerably faithful to its social and artistic traditions, seems drawing to a close, that this vivid and appreciative picture of its actual condition will have a permanent value for the sociologist and ethnologist.

The method followed in Green's "Making of England" has been happily adapted by Mr. Drake † to the first half century of New England history. Nothing better indicates the author's competence than the simple fact that a quarter of his volume is devoted to the work done by explorers before the landing of the Pilgrims. They who imagine that the history of New England begins with the settlement of Plymouth, assume that the Mayflower emigrants came to an unknown country, while the fact is that the entire sea coast, from the St. Lawrence to the Delaware, had been traced, its bays and rivers surveyed and described with considerable accuracy, the abodes and customs of the native tribes made known, and the resources of the country explained and exemplified. The route had been made familiar by the log-books of a thousand sailors, and the little band that left their refuge in Holland for Massachusetts Bay had more information about the land at which they aimed than was accessible to American settlers on the Pacific Coast as late as 1840. Another feature of the book, which shows how well the author understands the limitations of his subject, is his recognition that the making of New England was virtually complete with the Confederacy of 1643 between the colonies of Massachusetts, Plymouth, Connecticut, and New Haven. It was at least as proper for Mr. Drake to close his narrative at this point as it would be to consider the Making of Old England finished with the consolidation of Kent, Wessex, Mercia, and Northumbria, under Egbert.

\* Persia and the Persians, by S. G. W. Benjamin. Boston : Ticknor & Co.

† The Making of New England, by S. A. Drake. New York : Charles Scribner's Sons.